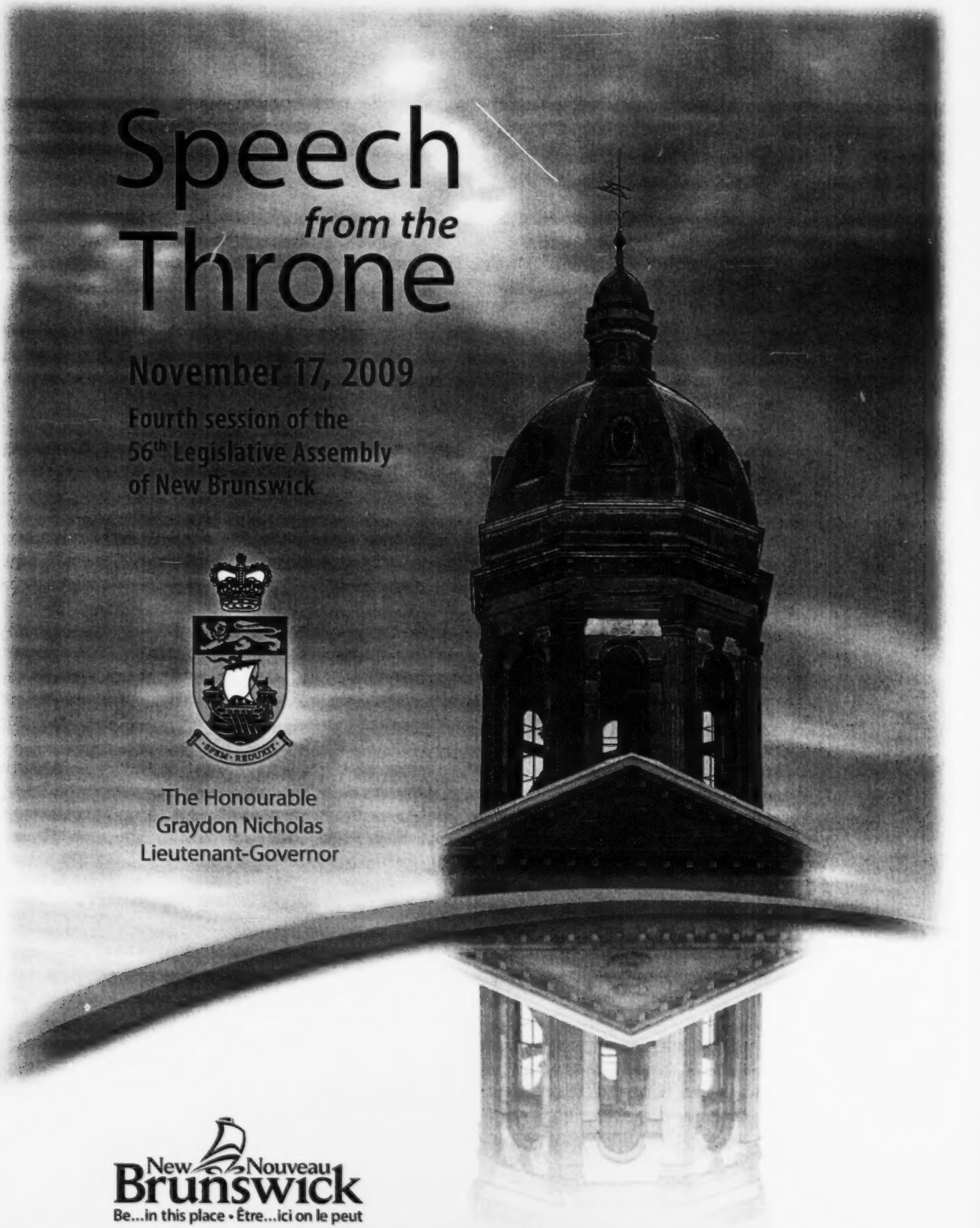
Speech
from the
Throne
November 17, 2009
Fourth session of the
56th Legislative Assembly
of New Brunswick
The Honourable
Graydon Nicholas
Lieutenant-Governor
New Nouveau
Brunswick
Be...in this place • Être...ici on le peut

2009 Speech from the Throne

Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and fellow New Brunswickers. Welcome to the opening of the Fourth Session of the 56th Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick.

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Speaker, your government thanks former Lieutenant-Governor Herménégilde Chiasson for his exemplary work and his dedication. He brought to his position a unique intellect, great empathy, and extraordinary passion for the province. Who better than Herménégilde Chiasson to welcome people to New Brunswick during the Congrès mondial acadien this summer!

Celebrations

A very important event for the province took place in August, when the Congrès mondial acadien was held. Thousands of people from all over the world came together in the Acadian Peninsula and focused international attention on New Brunswick. Everyone, young and old, experienced the pride and joy of the Acadian people.

In 2009, the Order of New Brunswick welcomed 10 new members:

- Frederick Beairsto;
- Claudette Bradshaw;
- Elphège Chiasson;
- Thomas Condon;
- Flora MacDonald Dell;
- Shirley Downey;
- Bertrand Johnson;
- Clare Whelton McCain;
- John McLaughlin; and
- Wendy Nielsen.

The Honourable Michel Bastarache was made a Companion of the Order of Canada and athlete Willie O'Ree, author Claude LeBouthillier and agrologist Donald Young were named Members of the Order of Canada. Earlier this month, former Canadian Auto Workers head Buzz Hargrove and former Premier Frank McKenna were welcomed as Officers of the Order of Canada.

On April 17, the New Brunswick government celebrated the 40th anniversary of the *Official Languages of New Brunswick Act.* To mark this anniversary, your government announced the establishment of a committee with representatives from all government departments, whose mandate is to develop a comprehensive strategy for implementing the *Official Languages Act* over the next five years.

This year, the Lieutenant-Governor's Dialogue Awards were presented to Edouard Allain, Rollande Landry, James Lockyer, Radio-Canada Acadie, and CBC Maritimes. These awards recognize outstanding efforts to promote understanding and respect between both official linguistic communities in our province.

Your government congratulates the athletes, coaches and managers of Team New Brunswick who proudly represented our province at the 2009 Games of La Francophonie and the 2009 PEI Canada Summer Games, particularly Allyssa Cleaves of St. Stephen, the gold medallist in women's wrestling.

We also send our best wishes to Luc Donovan and Shawn Matheson, who will represent Canada at the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver.

In the year ahead, the eyes of the international athletics world will be on New Brunswick as Moncton hosts the 2010 IAAF World Junior Championships; the largest international sporting event ever hosted in Atlantic Canada.

Condolences

On June 24, we lost one of our greatest pioneers in this province, Roméo LeBlanc, a former Governor General of Canada. Mr. LeBlanc was a major figure in the Acadian renaissance and gave New Brunswickers from all walks of life a voice that was recognized in Canada and throughout the world.

This was a passionate man of conviction whose story echoes the best values of our identity as Acadians, New Brunswickers, and Canadians.

We remember former members of this Legislature who passed away this year: Justice Lewis Ayles, Gordon Fairweather and Danny Cameron.

Today we also remember Louis C. Simard. M Simard was employed for the past nine years as a Commissionaire here in the Legislative Assembly.

New Brunswickers continue their selfless military service around the world. We remember all those who have sacrificed their lives as part of our armed forces, in particular:

- Trooper Corey Joseph Hayes
- Cpl. Kenneth Chad O'Quinn

- Cpl. Thomas James Hamilton
- Pte. John Michael Roy Curwin
- Pte. Justin Peter Jones
- Master Cpl. Charles-Philippe Michaud

Creating Opportunities Today for Self-Sufficiency Tomorrow

New Brunswickers are united in their pride in their province and in their confidence that we can be even greater, that we can create even more opportunities and that we can stand proudly as a leader among the provinces.

While we have regained confidence in our potential in these past few years, a self-sufficient future has not always been within our grasp. When your government came to office in 2006, we were faced with a declining population and a shrinking labour force. New Brunswick was being out-paced by other provinces that were cashing in on opportunities and leaving New Brunswick and its have-not status in their wake.

Upon assuming office, your government was convinced we had to be better. We had to do more. We needed to create more opportunities: more opportunities for workers, more opportunities to learn, more opportunities to bring our young people home, more opportunities to build stronger, better communities throughout this province. This is the driving force behind the self-sufficiency agenda.

To unite behind a shared vision and to marshal the talents and expertise of New Brunswickers, your government appointed the Round Table on Self-Sufficiency. Your government wants to thank all the New Brunswickers who have brought their expertise to these important discussions. This Round Table provides a non-partisan and ongoing forum to promote engagement and develop consensus around the province's long-term self-sufficiency objectives, priorities and strategies.

Over the past three years, bold and decisive action has yielded results.

Despite the loss of thousands of jobs in our forestry and manufacturing sectors, overall employment is up since September 2006. In fact, in these past three years, New Brunswick outpaced every other province and has led the country in employment growth. Employment in October stood at 369,400 - a record high.

Unemployment is down. In September, for the first time in the history of the modern labour survey, New Brunswick's unemployment rate fell below the national average; a feat we repeated in October.

Our population is up. We reversed years of population decline with 10 straight quarters of population growth. With an increase of more than 4,500 people through June 2009,

we continue to work towards our goal of 6,000 more New Brunswickers by the end of the year.

Immigration plays an important role in the growth of our economy. A $10-million initiative for Francophone immigration has recently been announced. The Population Growth Secretariat will manage this fund aimed at attracting, integrating and retaining Francophone immigrants. The funding will assist communities that have been affected by a decline in population and will support several key strategic activities for the success of the Francophone immigration program.

Literacy among our children is up. In 2009, 82 per cent of English Prime and 85 per cent of French Immersion students met or surpassed expectations in reading. Among Francophone students, there was a 14-percentage-point increase in reading outcomes in 2009 compared with 2006.

Tax levels are down. *The Plan for Lower Taxes* will result in savings that will grow to over $380 million annually. New Brunswickers saw the first tax reduction on July 1 and will see further reductions on January 1, 2010. By lowering taxes at a time when people and businesses are especially eager to reduce costs, New Brunswick will be even more competitive in its efforts to attract new residents and investment.

Great strides have been made but more must be done. Your government will continue to build on this success to create opportunities today for self-sufficiency tomorrow.

A moment for opportunity

When confronted with a gap between where we are and where we want to be, it takes more than timid steps to clear that chasm. It takes courage, conviction and a willingness to seize an opportunity and make a great leap.

225 years ago, this spirit inspired individuals like Edward Winslow to push for the creation of New Brunswick. It's what inspired New Brunswickers like Tilley, Wilmot and Fisher to make New Brunswick a leader in a new Dominion.

Louis Robichaud's program of Equal Opportunity was propelled by that same sense of urgency to clear the gulf between what we were and what we could become. And it was with courage and conviction that Richard Hatfield completed that work.

Over the course of our province's history, we have been confronted by those moments of opportunity, moments when, as Louis Robichaud famously said, "New Brunswick cannot wait."

It is with that same spirit that we have made great strides toward our destination of a self-sufficient New Brunswick but today gaps remain that will not be crossed with timid steps.

We are in fierce competition for economic opportunities to bring our workers home and attract new New Brunswickers. Jurisdictions across North America are hungry to regain the ground they lost during the recent economic downturn. Everyone is looking for an edge.

In New Brunswick, we do not have Nova Scotia's offshore gas or Newfoundland's offshore oil. We have to find innovative ways to be more competitive, to generate revenues, to lower debt and create greater fiscal flexibility for New Brunswickers. And we need to have lower priced electricity rates.

Simply put, our energy rates are not competitive. They make it tougher to attract investment and they have already cost us thousands of jobs in our mills and our manufacturing sector. The loss of those jobs is a high price to pay for the affected families and communities.

To bring stability to power rate increases, two years ago, your government imposed a three-year, three per cent-per-year cap on electricity rate increases. But this was only a temporary solution.

Across the province, families are looking to stretch their dollars further – to buy that first home, to invest in their children's education or simply to cover the necessities of life. Rising power rates are stressing our family budgets.

And looking ahead to the future we leave our children, we need tc decrease our debt and decrease our dependence on carbon-based fuels. In the coming years, there is every reason to believe there will be a significant cost placed on carbon-based fuels. Your government would eliminate this great financial risk by securing a supply of clean hydro power.

With so much uncertainty and volatility in oil, gas and coal prices, we cannot expose New Brunswickers to such an unpredictable future. We must act to protect New Brunswickers from this unpredictability and we must do so now. That is why your government has signed a proposed energy agreement for lower rates involving Hydro-Québec and NB Power.

With this proposed agreement, we have the chance to seize an enormous opportunity.

Approximately $4.8 billion or almost 40 per cent of the province's debt would be eliminated and New Brunswickers would benefit from the largest single debt repayment in the province's history.

New Brunswick households would see their power rates frozen for five years rather than have to deal with three per cent annual increases at a minimum. The average electrically heated home would save about $1,400 over that time and $465 per year every year after that. When the five-year period is up, power rates will only increase to keep pace with inflation and new generation needs.

New Brunswick industrial rates would be cut to match those in Quebec, which are among the lowest on the continent. These rate decreases of up to 30 per cent would secure existing jobs in our manufacturing and forest industry, benefitting thousands of New Brunswick workers and their families. As importantly, these lower rates would make New Brunswick more competitive in attracting investments and creating new job opportunities for New Brunswickers.

By seizing this opportunity and reducing our dependence on carbon-based fuels, New Brunswick can make important strides in environmental protection as part of this proposed agreement.

With the Climate Change Action Plan, your government aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2012. This proposed agreement would improve on that target, by reducing emissions to six per cent below 1990 levels. This reduction would meet the national standard under Kyoto, placing New Brunswick at the forefront in climate change achievement.

The closure of coal-fired facilities will bring a significant reduction in mercury emissions, enabling the province to surpass its national and international commitments. The retirement of the Grand Lake boilers announced earlier this year will reduce mercury emissions in the province by 85 per cent from 1998 levels.

An accelerated reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions will go well beyond the commitments established among New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers in Saint John in September.

Hydro-Québec is recognized as a world leader in renewable energy. Its Sustainable Development Action Plan commits to environmentally sound management and its interest in expanding its portfolio of renewable energy sources, especially wind power.

Additionally, the legislation that safeguards New Brunswick's land, air and water would apply to the activities of Hydro-Québec just as they have applied to NB Power, and all other New Brunswick industries.

Your government recognizes that New Brunswickers own this utility and wants to hear from them through this process. In order to ensure due diligence and to directly engage stakeholders, the legislation laying out the proposed regulatory framework will be referred to a legislative committee for review and feedback. Beyond the committee, the members of this House have an important role to play in bringing the views of their constituents to the debate around the many legislative changes required to implement this proposed agreement.

Low and more predictable electricity rates, massive debt reduction and a huge benefit for all New Brunswickers to enjoy cleaner air. These are changes for the better. But we are also proud of what would not change.

NB Power would remain a standalone company headquartered here in Fredericton. It would be managed by New Brunswickers and it would be staffed by New Brunswickers. Your government is proud of the extraordinary work of its employees. We want to thank them for all that they have done and all that they will continue to do. Their reputation and dedication has helped make this singular opportunity possible. As NB Power enters a new chapter, we have every faith that NB Power will continue to operate with the same high standards and deliver affordable power reliably.

Your government specifically wants to acknowledge the people of Dalhousie where the generating station will be phased out in June 2010. Efforts are already underway to identify new opportunities for workers in this community and these efforts will continue well into the next year. Similarly, at Grand Lake where the generating station closes in June 2010, your government is already working with community leaders to identify economic development opportunities as quickly as possible.

While we often hear suggestions to the contrary, under this proposed agreement, the Government of New Brunswick would retain complete control over its energy policies and regulations. Electricity generation and transmission would remain a regulated industry, just as in the many other provinces that do not own their own utility.

For example, New Brunswick would continue to make decisions on matters such as new power developments. New Brunswick continues to possess the geographic position, growing workforce and lower taxes necessary to attract new energy projects and strengthen the energy hub. Now, through this proposed deal, significantly lower electricity rates would put us in an even stronger position to attract investment in the energy sector.

Your government also welcomes the recent announcement that Prince Edward Island has begun formal discussions with Hydro-Québec. New Brunswick's development as an energy hub would be strengthened by the proposed agreement with Hydro-Québec, while further collaboration with PEI in the energy sector would be of benefit to all three provinces.

Just as it does today, the New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board would continue to regulate rates. In five years' time, any increases for new generation requirements beyond the heritage pool would require the approval of the Energy and Utilities Board.

As well, New Brunswick would have unfettered access to the province's transmission network.

New Brunswick's commitment to being a leader in energy conservation will be more important than ever. Since Efficiency NB was launched, over 10,000 homes in the province have been retrofitted for greater energy efficiency. Incentives of $17.5 million have leveraged investments of over $115 million in energy efficiency upgrades.

The resulting annual reduction in green house gases is equivalent to taking more than 13,000 cars off the road for a year. In May, the inaugural Premier's Awards for Energy Efficiency were presented to recognize innovation and leadership in energy efficiency.

Your government is leading by example by investing over $300 million in green construction. This lays a strong foundation for the new Green Buildings Policy to be presented during this session.

By taking measures to reduce our energy use, New Brunswick will be better able to control our future energy demands.

By boldly seizing this opportunity for a new direction in energy in the province, New Brunswick will gain more jobs, lower power rates for all New Brunswickers and a stronger overall economic situation today and in the future. At a time when every jurisdiction is fighting for an advantage, this opportunity offers New Brunswick an important competitive edge.

Seizing every opportunity to create jobs

With the *Plan for Lower Taxes* and some of the lowest electricity rates in the country under this proposed agreement, there has never been a better time to be in business in New Brunswick and there has never been a better time to chart a new direction for Business New Brunswick. The minister of Business New Brunswick has received significant and valuable recommendations from the business community on economic development in New Brunswick. The minister and his department will provide a list of recommendations for government that will form a new operational plan for Business New Brunswick.

Your government has established a new Northern Economic Development Agency, based in Bathurst, in order to address the unique challenges of that region. With a greater commitment from the private sector, the government will have a greater opportunity to ensure the development of new tools and new incentives aimed at attracting more investment and expanding key industries for the future. Business New Brunswick will soon appoint the new assistant deputy minister for the agency in Bathurst.

The new action plan for the North, which will be released soon, will be a critical tool for developing northern New Brunswick, from west to east. To this end, the $50-million Northern Economic Development Fund and the $100-million Northern New Brunswick Infrastructure Initiative will help diversify the economy.

Using this fund last June, your government made significant investments of $20.4 million for the northern region, to expand and upgrade facilities at the Port of Belledune. Upon completion, these upgrades will enable the port to play an even greater role in diversifying the economy in the northern part of the province and in making our province self-sufficient.

Lower taxes and lower electricity rates promise to make New Brunswick even more attractive to investors. Business New Brunswick is currently reviewing the $30-million budget for strategic grants to identify more effective alternatives that will complement these new incentives. As well a private-sector delivery model for loans to assist small businesses is being developed. The restructured New Brunswick Industrial Development Board will feature representatives from both government and the private sector. Stakeholders are currently being consulted regarding this new structure.

Through all these changes, Business New Brunswick will be able to build upon its impressive record of fostering economic development, convincing businesses to locate and expand in our province, and bringing new jobs and investment to our communities.

Your government has assisted literally hundreds of companies to stay in business, maintain New Brunswick jobs and create new ones as well.

Opportunity in all sectors

To ensure everyone can benefit from new opportunities, communities must be connected to one another and to the rest of the world.

Your government has invested almost $386 million in road work this year alone resulting in 465 kilometres of paving, 590 kilometres of chip sealing and 67 bridge projects. That's very good news for the communities which will benefit from these improved highways and for the hundreds of New Brunswickers working on these projects.

Connectivity in 2009 is about more than roads. By July 2010, all New Brunswick households will have access to affordable high-speed internet. As well Fredericton and Saint John are the first centres in Canada to be offered fibre-to-the-home technology for 100 per cent of their population.

Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries

The farming and fishing industries continue to be the heart of many rural New Brunswick communities. Your government will work with industry, financial institutions and federal partners to improve access to financial assistance.

As a follow-up to the 2009 New Brunswick Aquaculture Summit, your government will finalize sector strategies that will support the continued sustainable development of the aquaculture sector and our coastal communities.

Forest-Based Industry

The proposed agreement with Hydro-Québec has been welcomed as a significant step forward for our forestry sector.

Peter Gordon of Fraser Papers has said: "It gives us access to power rates our direct competitors in Quebec, British Columbia and the United States already get. This gives us the opportunity to be in the game and to attract new business to the province."

Kelly Shotbolt, president and CEO of Flakeboard, spoke to the impact the proposed agreement would have on workers and said: "The agreement goes a long way towards retaining the hard-working employees that make our operation a success, and ensuring that our company has a bright future in New Brunswick."

Just yesterday, 120 workers returned to work as Fraser Paper's lumber mill in Plaster Rock re-started operations. Your government was proud to support Fraser in breaking the mill's dependence on oil and lowering its conversion costs by 20 per cent. With the proposed lower electricity rates, the future for Fraser and its workers is even brighter.

In addition, your government is planning for future opportunities. In January 2009, a new long-term management approach for Crown forests was released. The total annual investment in Crown land silviculture is now more than $25 million.

In those communities which have been left with unused industrial assets, your government is pursuing investments to redevelop these assets and replace the lost employment and income. Rather than empty buildings, your government sees new opportunities.

Tourism

Despite the economic downturn, New Brunswick's tourism sector enjoyed positive results this year in increases in visitor traffic at many of the province's top attractions.

This summer in the Acadian Peninsula, New Brunswick was the proud host of the fourth Congrès mondial acadien. The three-week event was an unparalleled success, with more than 220,000 people taking part in activities and more than 50,000 participating in the Tintamarre. Your government contributed $1.8 million to the 2009 Congrès mondial to ensure its success, and the economic spin-offs are proof of that success. Work is already under way for the next gathering, which will be held in 2014 in the northwestern part of the province.

Your government, together with the tourism industry, will build on this success by launching a new provincial tourism strategy in 2010.

Heritage and Arts

Our creative cultural community plays an important role in New Brunswick's identity and our economy.

Since New Brunswick now has a Cultural Policy and a Book Policy to build on, developing an action plan to enhance the status of your artists is consistent with recent efforts aimed at supporting arts and culture.

The government will establish a Premier's task force on the socioeconomic status of artists, which will be called upon to make recommendations on recognizing the contribution artists make to society and on improving their socioeconomic situation.

Creating opportunities in a challenging fiscal environment

With the *Plan for a Stronger Economy,* New Brunswick was one of the first North American jurisdictions to respond to the economic crisis.

The provincial budget on December 1 will outline strong leadership in a challenging economic environment. Your government remains committed to fiscal responsibility and returning to balanced budgets through annual, incremental spending restraint. To ensure government is working in the most efficient and effective manner possible, your government will introduce the *New Brunswick Shared Services Agency Act* to create a new agency to provide internal common services that are essential to the functioning of government at a reduced cost to taxpayers.

Creating opportunity together

Your government recognizes that to move from where we are today to where we need to be, every New Brunswicker must have the opportunity to be part of the journey.

Actions by your government have helped reduce the strain on New Brunswickers' pocket books. The plan for lower taxes put significant savings in the pockets of New Brunswickers and the proposed deal with Hydro-Québec would provide lower and more predictable electricity rates for New Brunswickers trying to stretch their dollars further. The Enhanced Emergency Fuel Benefit Program recently announced will provide up to $550 in emergency funding to qualifying New Brunswick households.

But more must be done to create long-term opportunity; a more ambitious course must be charted. Over the past year, your government collaborated with private sector and community non-profit partners to develop a poverty reduction plan for New Brunswick. Your government would like to thank co-chairs Gerry Pond and Léo-Paul Pinet for their leadership, those who provided their expertise and most importantly, the 2,500 New Brunswickers who shared their stories, their passion and their ideas.

Overcoming Poverty Together

Last week, their work culminated in a remarkable consensus and the signing of *Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan.* This plan provides a roadmap to reduce poverty and create opportunity in our communities. Through this plan, social assistance will be transformed so that instead of

punishing those who want to work, it will support and encourage economic and social inclusion.

It has long been unacceptable that in a society as blessed as ours, people have been expected to live on less than $300 per month. During this session, your government will announce an immediate 80 per cent increase for this group. Other programs will be redesigned and made more generous in the years ahead.

The economic unit policy has long been seen as standing in the way of social inclusion for people on social assistance. Your government will announce immediate changes to allow more New Brunswickers living in poverty the company and economy of sharing expenses with family and friends.

All sectors have agreed to work together on a new universally affordable prescription drug plan to make sure that no New Brunswicker leaving poverty has to choose between a job and their health card. Your government will extend health benefits for up to three years for people leaving social assistance for work with the goal of starting to phase in a prescription drug plan for non-insured New Brunswickers starting in April 2012.

As well, the minimum wage will rise to the Atlantic average by September 2011 so that working New Brunswickers have the opportunity to earn a living wage. A new Homelessness Framework will strive to ensure that all New Brunswickers have the opportunity to have a roof over their head and a safe, warm place to go.

During this session, your government will also introduce the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* and the *Economic and Social Inclusion Act*. This new framework for social policy, the most significant legislative change since Equal Opportunity, will set the stage for a new era of community-based collaboration and solutions.

By 2015, New Brunswick will have made significant progress in reducing poverty and in promoting economic and social inclusion with a global objective to reduce income poverty by 25 per cent and deep-income poverty by 50 per cent. With this new plan and by taking up this cause together, more New Brunswickers will share more opportunities than ever before.

Children at Risk

The new plan to fight poverty complements your government's commitment to provide New Brunswick children with a safe, stable and secure home life. Through the first phase of our New Directions child welfare model, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of cases, as well as a significant drop in the number of children who are placed in foster homes.

New legislation being introduced this session will give social workers new tools to work with families sooner before they become higher risk cases. Your government will also move forward on the recommendations of the Report of the Access to Family Justice

Task Force to provide more timely access to justice, expanded use of alternatives to family court, and increased access to legal information and legal assistance in family law matters.

First Nations Communities

Your government will build on the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and New Brunswick Relationship Building Bilateral Agreement to ensure First Nation communities can benefit from economic opportunity. Aboriginal entrepreneurs and elders will be invited to participate in creating a Blueprint for Aboriginal Self-Sufficiency by 2026.

Pay Equity

The *Pay Equity Act 2009* will come into force on April 2010 and pay equity adjustments will begin to be phased-in for child care, home support, nursing home, community residences and transition house workers.

Persons with Disabilities

On December 3, the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons will release the second status report of the *Disability Action Plan Strategy.* As well, services under the Disability Support Program will be province-wide by the end of 2010 and will allow New Brunswickers with disabilities to participate more fully in their communities.

Creating the best opportunities to learn

Your government believes the best way to share economic opportunity is by creating the best opportunities to learn.

An opportunity to learn for life

Through The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education, more New Brunswickers have better access to the education and skills they need in order to take advantage of economic opportunities. Through the elimination of the spousal and parental contribution requirements for student loans and the introduction of the new Timely Completion Benefit and the new Repayment Assistance Plan, your government is helping to increase access and decrease debt for New Brunswick students and their families.

In the past two years, your government has created 950 new seats in our community colleges. During this session, your government will establish two community college systems independent from government. Your government will introduce the *New Brunswick Community Colleges Act* to create learning opportunities that are more student-focussed, better equipped, more entrepreneurial and more responsive to community and labour market needs.

By April 2010, the New Brunswick Community College and the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick will each be led by a president and governed by a board of directors. The head office for NBCC will be located in Fredericton and for CCNB in Bathurst.

The new college structure will respect linguistic duality, and each college will be administered on a linguistic basis, which will help promote the equality of both official linguistic communities.

Your government will also develop and implement a new apprenticeship model based on the results of an independent review as well as feedback from New Brunswickers on the recommendations in the report *Apprenticeship NB: A Proposed Governance Structure.*

Your government believes that all New Brunswickers should have the opportunity to continue to improve their skills no matter what their age. This fall your government removed fees for evening academic upgrading classes at community colleges and during this session, your government will release targets and an action plan to implement an adult literacy strategy which will be a component of a more comprehensive provincial literacy strategy to be developed.

More than 30 initiatives will be funded under the new Workplace Essential Skills program to provide an accelerated opportunity for workers to improve employment related skills. As well, the federal-provincial Targeted Initiative for Older Workers in communities affected by significant downsizing or closures has been extended for an additional three years.

Creating opportunities in New Brunswick schools

Your government continues to create opportunities in New Brunswick schools. Almost 85 per cent of the actions outlined in *When Kids Come First* are underway and this year, your government will continue to implement the plan, placing particular focus on early intervention, literacy, integrated services and school results.

Your government has invested an additional $32 million in inclusive education and continues to implement recommendations from the MacKay Report. A new Integrated Services Delivery Model will be piloted as part of your government's response to the *Connecting the Dots* report. Together, we are working to make sure all children receive the support they need.

Building on our record results in literacy, your government will implement the Elementary Literacy Friends / Centres de littératie pour les enfants program in both education sectors. Through this program, corporate and community partners will lend staff and resources to assist children with reading in schools throughout the province.

Just one year after implementation of the intensive French program, 58 per cent of English Grade 5 classes chosen as part of a random survey had reached or surpassed the proficiency level objective. The first intake of the new Grade 3 French immersion program will take place this year, in September 2010.

Last June, the Commission on Francophone Schools was created in response to one of the commitments in the *When Kids Come First* education plan. As a result, in partnership with the Francophone community, the government put in place a committee that will ensure recommendations are acted upon. As an important follow-up step, a financial contribution has already been announced for the implementation of a linguistic and cultural policy.

Your government would like to thank the commissioner, Gino LeBlanc, for his hard work and dedication to crafting this innovative educational partnership.

Your government continues its commitment to give more New Brunswick students the opportunity to discover what they love to do. Since 2006, more than three dozen new trades courses have been introduced in high schools and your government will continue to create new trades opportunities.

New Brunswick is a national leader in innovation in education. This year your government and Microsoft's *Partners in Learning* program committed to create two 'learning villages,' in Balmoral and Fredericton. This agreement is a Canadian first giving our kids some of the best learning opportunities in the country.

After seeing the impact New Brunswick's 51 new community schools are having on our children and our communities, UNESCO has adopted New Brunswick's community school model as a model for their international schools network throughout the world. We're not just helping to create learning opportunities here at home. We're creating them around the globe.

The best opportunities from the beginning

Your government is committed to providing the best opportunities to learn from the beginning of life.

As part of the commitments outlined in *Overcoming Poverty Together*, your government will introduce a new *Early Learning and Child Care Act* to ensure New Brunswick children get the best possible start in life. By 2015, your government will make the necessary investments in the early learning and child care sector to ensure that a minimum of 20 per cent of New Brunswick infants and half of New Brunswick's two-to-five year olds have access to a registered early learning space.

To prepare for these increased early learning opportunities, your government has introduced two new curricula for early learning and childcare – a French language

curriculum developed by the Université de Moncton and an English Language curriculum developed by the University of New Brunswick.

This measure is consistent with proposals regarding early childhood education made by the Commission on Francophone Schools, which recommends that linguistic reality be taken into account and programs developed with this in mind.

Creating equal opportunity for all to access quality health and senior care

With record investments, health care will be sustainable for future generations. Moving from eight regional health authorities to two has meant increased efficiencies, improved collaboration and less administrative spending.

The new structure puts patients first and respects the official languages and communities where the authorities have jurisdiction.

Since October 2006, New Brunswick has recruited 153 net new physicians and Statistics Canada reports that over 90 per cent of New Brunswickers have access to a family doctor.

These new physicians have helped dramatically reduce wait times. Wait times for surgery dropped by 24 per cent between June 2008 and June 2009. For cancer-related surgeries, the decline in the median wait-time fell from 18 days to 14 days.

To ensure that New Brunswick is better able to respond to trauma situations, Dr. Marcel Martin, the new medical director of the new Provincial Trauma Program, will lead the development and implementation of an integrated and coordinated trauma system for the people of New Brunswick.

Last year New Brunswick became only the second province to enable pharmacists to prescribe drugs in certain situations. This expanded role means more convenience for patients, greater ease in obtaining refills and time saved overall in dealing with prescription changes.

The proclamation of the *Midwifery Act* later this fall will ensure a smooth introduction of and transition to midwives and provide expectant New Brunswick parents more choices. RHAs will be in a position to recruit and hire midwives before the end of this fiscal year.

Your government will formally launch the first component of *one patient, one record* for all New Brunswickers in the coming year. When fully implemented, *one patient, one record* will benefit New Brunswickers by providing relevant information to clinicians who provide health care and services.

Through improved services, new teams of health care providers and new health care settings, your government is committed to creating equal opportunity for all New Brunswickers to access quality health care whether they live in urban centres or rural communities

As the world faces the first pandemic influenza in more than 30 years, your government will provide the H1N1 vaccine to every New Brunswicker who wishes to have it. Approximately 140,000 New Brunswickers have been vaccinated thus far. The recently modernized *Public Health Act* enhances our ability to protect public health through an outcome-focussed approach with less red tape and better results for New Brunswickers.

Improving the management of chronic health conditions offers one of the greatest opportunities to improve quality of life and reduce the demands for expensive in-patient care. Working with advocacy and professional groups, your government will introduce a Chronic Disease Prevention and Management Strategy to assist in identifying chronic disease, improve the management of chronic health conditions and provide enhanced support to those individuals who are living with a chronic disease.

In response to the McKee Report, *"Together into the Future,"* your government will introduce a Provincial Mental Health Strategy including a vision and guiding principles to revitalize the mental health system. As well, a new psychiatric hospital complex will replace the aging Restigouche Hospital Centre in Campbellton.

During this session, your government will introduce a *Prescription Monitoring Act* to provide a real-time information network to share a patient's monitored drug history among his or her health care providers and to promote the best prescribing and dispensing practices. It will enable early identification and management of patients at risk for addiction. These measures are designed to reduce the misuse and abuse of monitored drugs.

Senior care

Your government is committed to giving New Brunswick seniors the opportunity to be independent longer. The monthly hours of home support have been increased and your government has improved wages and travel allowances for home support workers. Seniors' assets are now protected from the calculation of nursing home fees and hours of care have increased in nursing homes.

Your government is preparing to announce a major plan for nursing homes, including a new, $31.5-million nursing home for the Town of Dalhousie. Capital renewal and replacement will be an integral part of your government's ongoing effort to fulfill its commitment to add 700 additional nursing home beds.

A collective opportunity for a shared future

Over the course of this session, ministers will provide details regarding the initiatives contained in this Speech from the Throne. Amendments to a variety of Acts of the Legislative Assembly will be introduced and debated.

A new budget will allow us to continue to seize more economic opportunities, create the best learning opportunities and increase access to health and senior care.

Legislation supporting *Overcoming Poverty Together* will create greater opportunities for social and economic inclusion for all New Brunswickers.

Finally, there can be no doubt that the proposed energy agreement with Hydro-Québec represents one of the most significant debates to take place in this legislature in some time. This proposed agreement has the potential to position New Brunswick for dramatic economic growth, eliminate a massive portion of the provincial debt while making a household necessity more affordable for New Brunswickers.

May divine Providence continue to bless New Brunswick and its residents, and guide this Assembly in its deliberations.